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— H. STUART HUGHES, *Harvard University*

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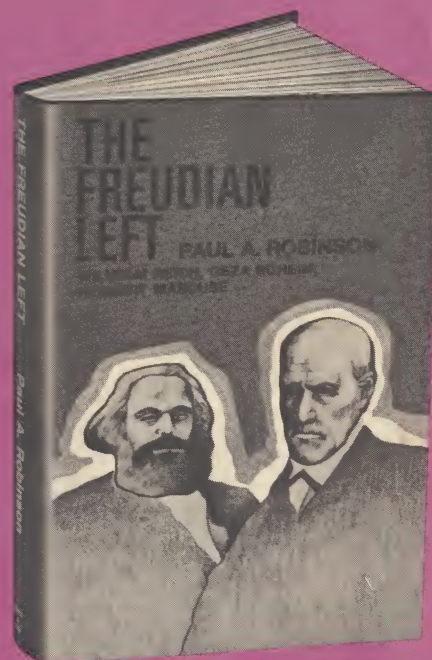
THE FREUDIAN LEFT

by Paul A. Robinson

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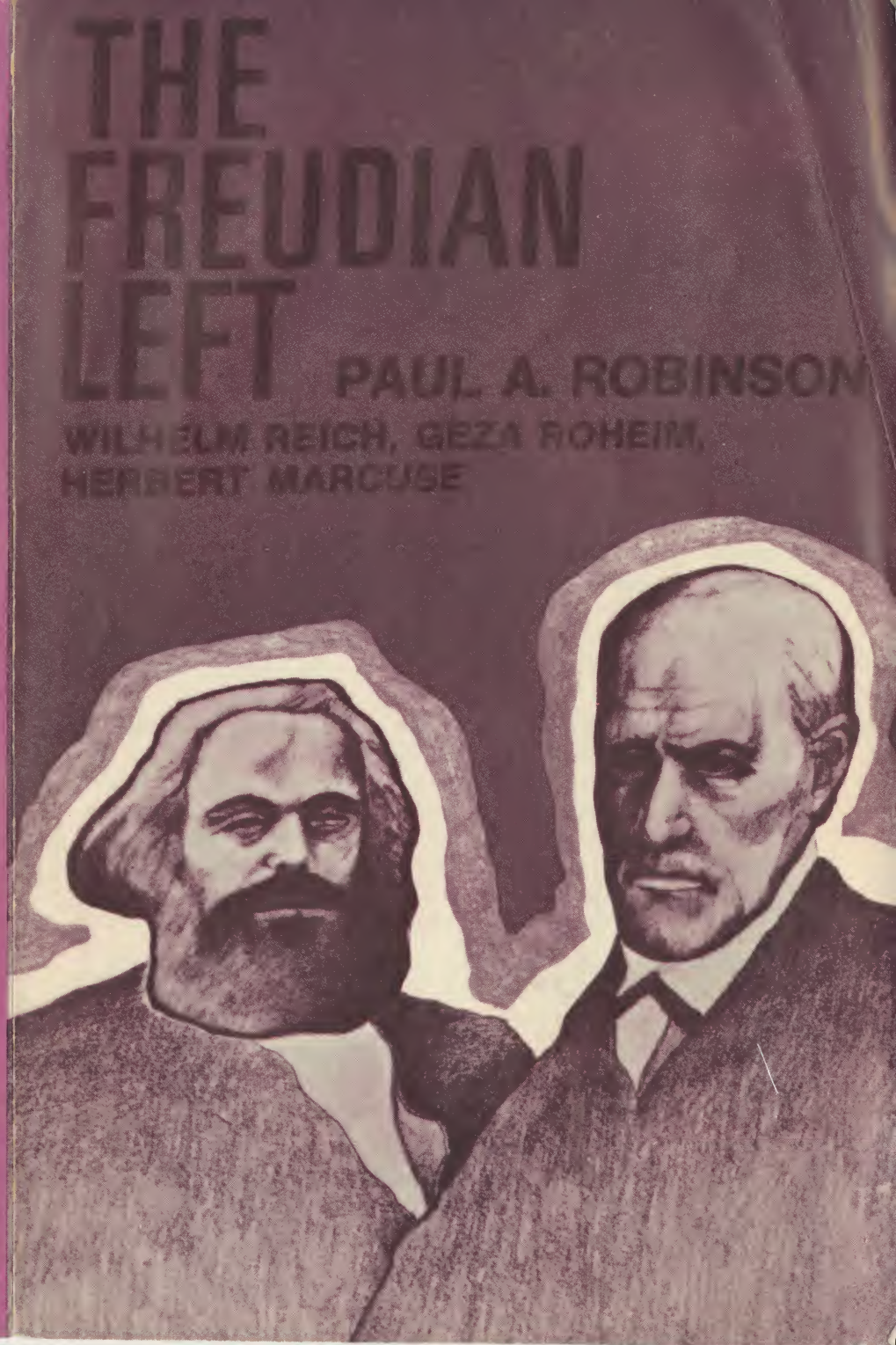
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LAST year in a review in these bulletins of Paul Roazen's *Freud: Political and Social Thought* I called for a serious examination of the social and political theories developed out of psychoanalysis by Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, and Norman O. Brown. THE FREUDIAN LEFT by Paul A. Robinson more than meets that need. The author analyzes not only the above-named thinkers, celebrated on the political left, but also illuminates the basic contribution of that ambiguous figure, the psychoanalyst-anthropologist Geza Roheim.

On the whole the radical tradition in psychoanalysis has not been taken seriously by analysts themselves. Even though our world, in the throes of an enormous sexual upheaval, has seen the end of some repressions—repressions thought to be inescapable discontents of civilization—the prophets of sexual liberation have been studiously ignored by both the orthodox and the neo-Freudian camps. Only Roheim has a secure place in official psychoanalysis—he was a practicing analyst and a member of the orthodox institute until his death in 1953—but the radical implications of his work have not been admitted into the orthodox theoretical structure.

As for Reich, having begun on the side of the angels, as one of Freud's great favorites, that demonic figure was carried away by the libido theory, embraced communism for a time, fell from grace, and eventually assumed martyrdom. Except for his classic work, *Character Analysis*, Reich's ideas have been deemed unworthy of serious consideration. Finally, Marcuse and Brown, coming to Freudianism from political philosophy and literature respectively, have simply not been recognized in the psychoanalytic literature.

Paul A. Robinson is Assistant Professor of History at Stanford University. *His book contains a clear exposition of the ideas of his subjects, their relationship to Freud, Marx, European intellectual and philosophical traditions, and to each other. His analyses and evaluations are scholarly, and informed by a vivid interest in his protagonists and a commitment to the general point of view they represent.*

THE FREUDIAN LEFT takes the form of intellectual biographies of Reich, Roheim, and Marcuse. Readers who found *Life Against Death* a mind-stretching experience might quarrel with Robinson's decision not to give Norman O. Brown a chapter to himself. However, some of Brown's

ideas are discussed in the chapter on Marcuse. While the two thinkers are remarkably similar in their basic notions, each has his own perspective and insights.

Robinson's basic criterion for admission to the Freudian left is *commitment to sexual liberation*. In Marxian thought the basic engine of civilization is economic—social domination resulting from ownership of the means of production. In Freudian thought the engine is sexual. *These Freudian radicals maintain that social domination depends on sexual repression*. However, only Reich and Marcuse sought an amalgamation of the Marxian and Freudian positions.

Reich, of course, was the pioneer Freudian radical. In *Die Funktion des Orgasmus* (1927) he concluded that the goal of psychoanalytic therapy was "the establishment of orgasmic potency." Freud was unenthusiastic about Reich's simplistic analysis. He himself was developing the complex theoretical position of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which seemed to regard as necessary those very repressions Reich and his ideological descendants sought to eliminate. Ideologically and personally, Freud and Reich were at loggerheads and the final break of 1934 was inevitable and a relief to both. Ironically, while Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association for his bolshevism and his book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, this same book was castigated by the Communists as counterrevolutionary; further, he was labeled a "sexual deviationist" and expelled from the Party!

Unlike Reich who advertised his deviationism, Geza Roheim was an underground radical in the psychoanalytic movement. His theoretical discoveries were often buried in a mass of anthropological data, and his ideological development was characterized by a struggle to corroborate and defend Freud's cultural and political theories. Robinson leads us expertly through the maze of Roheim's development to the resolution of his ambivalence toward Freud's primal crime hypothesis in his own theory of the origins of culture.

Robinson is no less expert in his account of the development of Marcuse into a Freudian radical. He has beautifully delineated Marcuse's reinterpretations of Hegel, Marx, and Freud, and spelled out the synthesis of Freud and Marx that Marcuse achieved, a synthesis initiated by Reich and attempted by other critics with indifferent success.

THE FREUDIAN LEFT should be welcomed on all sides. The New Left will be grateful to have an eloquent and concise exposition of some of its basic concepts. Anthropologists, sociologists, and economists should appreciate its brilliant analyses, and psychoanalysts of all persuasions may gain a new perspective over and above their immediate clinical concerns.

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